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Gorbachev trying to bring Lithuania back into the fold

MOSCOW (AP) — President Mikhail S. Gorbachev will undertake a mission to Lithuania within days to try to bring that republic's renegade Communist Party back into the fold, Soviet party officials said Tuesday.

The Lithuanian Communist Party declared itself independent Dec. 20, creating the first major crack in the monolithic party forged by Vladimir Lenin before the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

Gorbachev blasted the Lithuanian party leadership at a plenum of the Soviet party's Central Committee that met Monday and Tuesday to consider the Lithuanian move.

He accused the Lithuanians of creating a "schism of progressive forces," breaking party rules and allowing themselves to become "hostages to separatists."

But, in a report published Tuesday in the party newspaper Pravda, he also urged "maximum restraint" to allow emotions to cool. His report was unanimously approved by the 250-member Central Committee.

The plenum decided to dispatch

Gorbachev and other top party officials to Lithuania "both to explain our position and at the same time to get a better sense of the situation there," Vadim A. Medvedev, a Politburo member and the party's chief ideologist, told a news conference afterward.

Medvedev said some speakers at the plenum proposed kicking the independent-minded Lithuanians out of the national party or annulling the Lithuanian decision, but others pushed more moderate measures.

All were united, however, in their disapproval of the Lithuanian move, Medvedev said. "Most agreed that this was a blow to perestroika," he said.

After the Central Committee trip, which Medvedev said would take place "in not very many days," another Central Committee meeting will be held in January to make a firm decision on the dispute.

The Lithuanian Communist leader who led the break with Moscow, Algirdas Brazauskas, praised the plenum's decision in a radio interview and said the party officials' visit would be "good and helpful,"

an editor at Lithuanian Radio said.

Despite the postponement of a full decision, the Central Committee's stand as stated Tuesday clearly refused to recognize the Lithuanian party's self-proclaimed independent status.

"No part of the Soviet Communist Party has the right to decide the question about its independent existence with its own program and rules, not taking into account the position of the Soviet Communist Party as a whole," Gorbachev said in the report approved by the plenum. "And this means that the Communist Party of Lithuania was and remains a part of the united Soviet Communist Party."

Gorbachev tried for several months to head off the Lithuanian split, and at the Congress of People's Deputies meeting in Moscow on Saturday lashed out at separatists.

"Today, to realize the right to self-determination through secession means to blow up the union, set the people against each other and sow conflict and blood and death," Gorbachev said.